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NEWS
FROM YOUR MUSEUM
THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

Know your Museum better

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BIRCH-BARK CANOE CLOSELY COPIED

In the design and construction of bark canoes Algonkian-speaking tribes of North America achieved a remarkable degree of creative skill. No craft ever made is more perfectly adapted for use in the regions of lakes, streams, and forests where these Indians roamed. No craft combines beauty and utility more harmoniously. It has superb buoyancy afloat and a gratifying lightness for easy carrying overland. When the first explorers and settlers came to the north-eastern regions of North America the birch-bark canoes commanded their admiration and adoption. And while in later days machine-shaped wood or man-made fabrics have taken the place of bark in the making of canoes, the Indian design and his fundamental principles of construction to ensure speed and sea-worthiness have been closely copied, from the lipper-turning prow to the roller-riding stern. Copper nails have taken the place of spruce roots for binding the parts, and the ribs are no longer handhewn. But the Indian birch-bark canoe was the original model for the gayly painted, commercially made craft upon a thousand lakes; paddles familiar to these tribesmen for countless generations are still the approved design for maximum efficiency. With crude tools the Indians cut and fitted the bark of the white birch, bound the sections with fibrous roots, sealed them with spruce gum, fashioned the ribs and boards with grace and skill, and created a craft which was a priceless gift to the world—the canoe. Of all the countless examples of Indian skills at the Royal Ontairo Museum, no display arouses or is worthy of greater interest or admiration than the Ojibwa canoes which reveal all details of construction.

PRAIRIE CHICKENS RETURN TO ONTARIO

In describing the range of the Prairie Chicken, bird books tell of the gradual trek northwestward over the Canadian plains of this diminishing species, and add, "formerly in Ontario." A revision is indicated. A specimen in the Royal Ontario Museum of Zoology was found dead by a railroad worker 50 miles north-west of Fort William in 1929, first evidence that the true Prairie Chicken or pinnated grouse was back in the province after an absence of many years. About 1932 they were reported on Manitoulin Island, welcome invaders from the Michigan mainland where numerous colonies are found. Since then they appear to become permanent settlers on the Island, and to date they are known to be present at about 30 different points. So deep is the interest in this recurrence of the Prairie Chicken in Ontario that the department of Lands and Forests has commissioned James L. Baillie, ornithologist of the Royal Ontario Museum, to take a census of the birds and report on the possibilities for eventually securing breeding stock for introduction to other areas of the province. Because of the great value of these game birds and the fact that their numbers have decreased deporably in years past, they are legally protected and this protection will be rigidly enforced until all danger that they will share the fate of the now extinct Heath Hen has been removed.

MUSEUM CONTRIBUTES MINERALS FOR LIÈGE MUSEUM

When the Germans left the city of Liège in Belgium on September 7th, 1944, the Mineralogical Museum of the University of Liège, housing one of the world's finest collections of minerals, was destroyed by fire. But the Liège Museum is to rise again.

Early in 1945 a group of American scientists and mineral-lovers formed a committee for the restoration of the Liège mineral collections.

Dr. V. B. Meen, Associate Director of the Royal Ontario Museum of Geology and Mineralogy, was chosen as Canada's representative on the committee. Universities, museums, mining companies and individuals were asked to donate specimens for the collection. Fo two years mineral specimens have been arriving at the Royal Ontario Museum where Dr. Meen has been selecting the Museum's contributions. One of the specimens being sent was previously donated to the Museum by Major Bernhard Day the Belgiam Consul, who has lent his whole-hearted support to the project.

In all, three hundred and three specimens are being sent from Canada and these minerals are almost entirely of Canadian origin. There are suites of minerals from Cobalt camp, International Nickel Company, Falconbridge Mines, New Calumet Mines, the lithium pegmatite deposits in Manitoba and individual specimens from many other Canadian mines. The famous mineral localities of Eastern Ontario and the Bay of Fundy are well represented in Canada's contribution.

DOLLS ARE DIFFERENT IN NORTHLAND

Affection is lavished on dolls by little girls around the world. Mostly by little girls—but when Mr. Stuart Downing of the Royal Ontario Museum was showing an Indian doll to a visitor, it was evident that affection for it was present in his heart, too. It wasn't a flaxen-haired beauty with a perpetual grin and go-to-sleep eyes but what was once a real baby seal in its white skin of infancy. It had been stuffed with feathers, the eyes marked with dark cloth; and no imitation Teddy Bear or other stuffed toy beloved of a Canadian child was ever more "cuddly." Some Indian children in northernmost Quebec's coastal region had once owned the tiny stuffed seal. Eskimo children make dolls' clothing from the long, fluffy skins of lemmings, those rodents abundant in Arctic realms which are the main food supply of snowy owls, Arctic foxes, and other animals

MUSEUM EXHIBITS SILK SCREEN TEXTILES

An exhibition of Canadian silk screen textile designs, many of them inspired by Canadian motifs, by Wilcom Fabrics, will be in the Special Exhibition Gallery of the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology from November 4th to 30th. This exhibition of exclusively hand-made fabrics has recently been displayed in the Museum, in London, Ontario, where it created considerable interest.